

Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth (BCEG)  
Project

**Recommendations for *SmartInfo***

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*Prepared for:*

**Bulgaria Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project**

The Project is a collaborative initiative between the

**United States Agency for International Development**

and the

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implemented by

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## Preface

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development, (USAID), as part of its strategic support to the Republic of Bulgaria. The Project is sponsored by USAID in conjunction with the Government of Bulgaria – the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MoEW). The Project is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two governments, and its implementation covers the period: May 2000 – October 2002.

This Project is a logical evolution of earlier USAID assistance to biodiversity conservation in the country. It follows some 10 years of assessment, technical assistance and financing of Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategic development, new protected areas legislation, and new national park institutions. The Project is designed to capitalize on the achievements of the Bulgaria Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Biodiversity Project (implemented during the period June 1995-April 2000), and builds on lessons learned.

The BCEG Project addresses six specific contract themes known as tasks or “contract result packages”. The BCEG Project includes the finalization and implementation of two national park management plans, and the development of a new management plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park. It assists in the development of financial mechanisms and strategies to ensure the solvency of national parks. The Project pilots economic growth activities with select target communities around two Bulgarian national parks. And it continues to build on the principles of strong public information and awareness as stepping stones for informed public engagement and promotion of biodiversity conservation and protected area management activities.

This Project is issued as a Task Order 01 (Contract Number LAG-I-00-99-00013-00) under the USAID Global Biodiversity and Forestry Indefinite Quantities Contract; and is implemented on behalf of USAID by Associates in Rural Development, (ARD) Inc., of Burlington, Vermont, USA.

The Project is implemented through a Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Sofia, and includes a Team Leader, three Bulgarian technical specialists, and support staff.

Project activities are coordinated through two mechanisms –

- (a) Project Coordination Group – serves as a steering committee for Project planning and monitors implementation. This consists of the National Nature Protection Service of the MoEW, and national park directors, the PMU and USAID.
- (b) Project Counterpart Team – PMU staff working with MoEW/NNPS counterparts.

The Project is largely implemented through the Directorates for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Additional technical assistance is provided by Bulgarian and international consultants, and is based on specific terms of reference.



## Recommendations for *SmartInfo* Terms of Reference (TOR)

These TOR recommendations have been written in support of the Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth (BCEG) Project that is being led by ARD Bulgaria and is sponsored by USAID and the Government of Bulgaria. Dr. Donald Hawkins, who has been involved with the BCEG project through many onsite-consulting engagements and whose expertise is in tourism and sustainable development, has revised this translated TOR with input from knowledgeable professionals. This document has been organized with an understanding of the objectives of the SmartInfo stakeholders and the need for immediate system development.

The SmartInfo website has tremendous online marketing potential for Bulgarian tourism. As SmartInfo develops into this web-based marketing tool we suggest that it should include the following characteristics: 1) SmartInfo as a gateway for Bulgarian tourism service and product site, 2) SmartInfo as a reservations portal, and 3) SmartInfo as an educational resource for tourism professionals and businesses. SmartInfo has the opportunity to unite progressive web marketing techniques with the traditional marketing concepts. This merger may allow SmartInfo to encompass: the best elements of “model” or “benchmarked” websites, tourism products and services, pricing and sales, international market presence, promotion, customer profiling, purchasing power, and a business/website improvement center.

There are many resources available online and through publications which may aid in the development of SmartInfo. One such resource is a World Tourism Organization Business Council publication called, “E-Business for Tourism: Practical Guidelines for Destinations and Businesses”. This booklet discusses such topics as: the concepts of e-business, the potential of e-marketing and customer relationship management, destination management systems case studies, consumer websites, and networks for the tourism industry. Another book to consider reviewing is by David Siegel and it is titled, “Creating Killer Web Sites: The Art of Third-Generation Site Design”.

The following three sections list valuable online resources for the SmartInfo design team to consider as they finalize the TOR and open the consulting invitation. These sections are recommended course of action and development and include: 1) The Benchmarking of Websites and Reservations Systems, 2) The Selection and Background Study of Bulgarian Websites to be included in SmartInfo, and 3) The Creation of a “Business Improvement Center” site.

### **Benchmark Websites and Reservations Systems**

It would be beneficial to benchmark sites from around the world, which reflect elements that SmartInfo would like to embody. As the SmartInfo design team views and chooses “model” websites, it would be wise for them to practice reverse engineering and to study the site’s construction and coding. Having live links set up on SmartInfo pages may also improve the quality of Bulgarian sites and inspire Bulgarian business owners to upgrade their products and

services. Benchmarking admirable websites and reservations systems will give SmartInfo designers and viewers a cutting edge advantage as to current systems and technologies being used in the tourism industry worldwide.

Some excellent examples of tourism sites to review may include:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <a href="http://www.internationalexpeditions.com">www.internationalexpeditions.com</a> | an exclusive, niche Tourism Company   |
| <a href="http://www.orbitz.com">www.orbitz.com</a>                                     | a travel and tourism information and reservations company   |
| <a href="http://www.innfinder.com">www.innfinder.com</a>                               | a database/website for inn stays  |
| <a href="http://www.ecotourism.org">www.ecotourism.org</a>                             | an international membership organization and responsible travel resource  |
| <a href="http://www.ecotourism.com">www.ecotourism.com</a>                             | an ecotourism resource for products, services and business improvement websites   |
| <a href="http://www.ictam.com.ar/default.asp?l=e">www.ictam.com.ar/default.asp?l=e</a> | international training information and links on adventure tourism   |
| <a href="http://www.gwutourism.org">www.gwutourism.org</a>                             | an example of Flash technology used for The Department of Tourism and Hospitality website at George Washington University in the US                               |
| <a href="http://www.ste.com.sg">www.ste.com.sg</a>                                     | an internal tourism industry communications site including a travel agent directory, bulletin boards, events listing and registration, advertisements and courses |

Reservation Systems and links to explore may include:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <a href="http://www.execu-tech.com">www.execu-tech.com</a>   | a site showcasing property management, reservations systems, hotel, retail, restaurant, point of sale and real estate software   |
| <a href="http://www.macinn.com">www.macinn.com</a>           | a site hosting reservations and property management software for Inns, B&Bs, Motels, Hotels, Campgrounds etc...                  |
| <a href="http://www.guestmaster.com">www.guestmaster.com</a> | a reservations and property management systems resource for Guest Master software, as well as a database of hotels and hoteliers |
| <a href="http://www.swmaker.com">www.swmaker.com</a>         | review the InnOvations reservation software site, InnOvations is especially designed for small lodging establishments            |

## Selection and Background Study of Bulgarian Websites

It would be worthwhile for the SmartInfo design team to determine criteria for the Bulgarian website selection process. This process will ensure that only quality websites are included on the SmartInfo system, which would serve as a portal. Example criteria may include:

1. Ability of the company or organization to update travel and service information in a timely and organized manner
2. Easily navigable site pages
3. Organized display of information
4. Speed of the site and photograph loading time
5. Attractiveness of the website
6. Accuracy of content

These sites, which contain information about travel in Bulgaria today, may be included in the initial review:

<http://www.bulgarian-tourism.com/>

<http://www.asystbg.com/rila/>

<http://naturetour.digicom.bg/>

<http://get.info.bg/visit/Dir.asp>

<http://tourist.cjb.net/>

<http://www.mi.government.bg/eng/tur/pol.html>

<http://www.touristreklama.com/index/html>

<http://www.lidiatours.com/>

<http://www.tte.ch/Bulgaria/index.html>

[www.sofia.com](http://www.sofia.com)

<http://beautifulbulgaria1.webfactory.bg>

<http://www.undp.bg/>

<http://www.government.bg/eng/other/i>

[www.art.bg/main.htm](http://www.art.bg/main.htm)

[www.peakview.bg/I\\_club.htm](http://www.peakview.bg/I_club.htm)

[www.artsworld.com/centralbalkan/](http://www.artsworld.com/centralbalkan/)

[www.birdwatchingholidays.com/](http://www.birdwatchingholidays.com/)

<http://rila.virtualave.net/>

[www.park-vitosha.org/English](http://www.park-vitosha.org/English)

<http://bg-tourism.ttm.bg>

[www.bulgariatravel.org](http://www.bulgariatravel.org)

[www.icn.bg/bgguide](http://www.icn.bg/bgguide)

[www.emulateme.com/bulgaria.htm](http://www.emulateme.com/bulgaria.htm)

<http://visit.to/Bulgaria>

[www.interrinet.bg](http://www.interrinet.bg)

[www.bulgaria-embassy.org](http://www.bulgaria-embassy.org)

[www.cs.columbia.edu/~radev/bulgaria](http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~radev/bulgaria)

[www.bulgaria.com](http://www.bulgaria.com)

[www.travel-bulgaria.com](http://www.travel-bulgaria.com)

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

[www.frommers.com](http://www.frommers.com)

[www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)

[www.bradt-travelguides.com](http://www.bradt-travelguides.com)

[www.inyourpocket.com](http://www.inyourpocket.com)

[www.bootsnAll.com](http://www.bootsnAll.com)

[www.greentravel.com](http://www.greentravel.com)

[www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

[www.roughguides.com](http://www.roughguides.com)

[www.fodors.com](http://www.fodors.com)

[www.discoverbulgaria.com](http://www.discoverbulgaria.com)

## Create a “Business Improvement Center” site

SmartInfo would enhance its audience base by adding a Business Improvement Center module. This module could: 1) Include material, which can be used by small hotels and tour operators to improve their websites, publications, services and operations; 2) Give links to “model” sites and systems from around the world; 3) Give examples of certification programs; 4) Give examples of tools from the STEP program (Small Tourism Enterprise Program).

One example of such a site is: <http://caribbeaninnkeeper.com>. This site is comprised of the following sections: Support and Training, News and Events, About Your Business, Other Links, Marketplace and About Us. In the “About Your Business” section the following subjects are covered: Finance and Investment, Hotel Management and Operations, Marketing and Business Planning. Having such vital and consistently updated information available online has allowed local, regional and international viewers to benefit and improve their businesses. SmartInfo could either link to this site or create a Bulgarian version of this tourism business “toolkit”.

Another site to consider reviewing as a model for tourism business development and enhancement is: <http://bhudak.com> Bhudak Consulting, Inc. is an adventure tourism training and consulting firm which provides training workshops, consulting services, curriculum development, and publications to businesses, communities, government agencies and educational institutions.

In terms of providing a section for web development tools, SmartInfo could carry links exemplifying creative web design techniques, which may inspire Bulgarian tourism businesses to update their current websites and strive for a presence on SmartInfo. Interesting links to showcase may include:

[www.memberware.com](http://www.memberware.com)

Access their 10 point website assessment and their “Managing Content on Large Websites” section

[www.knowledgestorm.com](http://www.knowledgestorm.com)

A business to business IT solutions resource and web training website

<http://www.menuez.com/>

Digital Moments: a great example of animated gifs and creative imaging

<http://www.mungopark.com/>

Mungo Park: an excellent example of using Flash software

<http://www.gwutourism.org/>

Another example of Flash technology

If created, this “website development” section within the “Business Improvement Center” section can also include: a virtual library, software and download links, gif and jpeg image compression instructions, best practice chat rooms and web design firms to contact for assistance.

## SmartInfo Upgrading

The SmartInfo System has existed since April 1998. Currently, new information for licensed companies and categorized tourist sites is being added to the database. The system is expected to host these new additions and will soon issue a TOR to prospective vendors. It is recommended that the following specific terms be included, and that some of the needs described earlier in this report be considered as well.

### The characteristics of SmartInfo

The characteristics of the existing information system were decided through conversations, starting in 1998, among the Ministry of Commerce in Bulgaria, specialists from the ex-MTT, PHARE program consultants and the tourist counsel. To create SmartInfo and to develop the identified characteristics, the following activities have been encouraged and some of them have been completed:

- 1) Build a database of and for tourist services in Bulgaria
- 2) Create a central, virtual “hub” (translated as “system nucleus” in previous documents) for pertinent travel information and resources
  - a. This site has to contain priority information to support the Tourism Information System (TIS)
  - b. This site has to be able to expand with new modules in the future
  - c. This site must be compatible with modern information technologies, such as client to server and internet/intranet capabilities
  - d. This site must meet the needs of local and regional markets and be introduced as soon as possible
- 3) Attract the following audiences to use and support SmartInfo development: Bulgarian governmental ministries, tourist counsels, tour operators, hotel and restaurant proprietors, domestic and international tourists, and foreign development agencies
- 4) Incorporate information regarding: cultural, historical and ecological attractions, parks, restaurants and tourism products such as tour packages.
- 5) Add a reservations capability to SmartInfo
- 6) Design SmartInfo with meta tags so that the site is one of the first sites users are prompted to access when searching for tourism information in Bulgaria
- 7) Create an “email input” field and generate a list serve of potential clients/interested parties, use information collected from the users for marketing and site design
- 8) Design SmartInfo to function with the current internet service available in Bulgaria, however make sure that it is flexible enough to grow into new service capabilities as more web companies enter the Bulgarian market



## Current Architecture

SmartInfo is a technology driven product to promote and support tourism activities in Bulgaria, however, as the design team writes the request for proposal (RFP) they will want to consider the front-end design, as well as the back-end system architecture. We therefore recommend that significant time is given to creating the visual “character” of the website. As the SmartInfo RFP attracts design consultants and firms, consider their suggestions regarding different technology packages and software. However, at this time the SmartInfo design team is considering the following technology:

The system architecture includes three modules:

- Module “Level TS” (regional/local)
- Module “Level Ministry”
- WEB-server

The system supports vertical and horizontal integration of business-processes. The subsystem, called SmartPipe, offers incremental import/export capabilities. SmartPipe is used to synchronize the central database with local databases of TS, which does not have an Internet connection.

## Technology Considered at this Time

| Subsystem        | Database                  | Realization/ Output  |
|------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Level “TS”       | Local database-Sybase SQL | Client/server- PowerBuilder Internet access  |
| Level “Ministry” | Central database-Sybase   | Client/server-PowerBuilder   |
| WEB server       | Using central database    | Published WEB-pages are dynamic with high speed access to the database, therefore ensuring the effective completion of all WEB queries |

## The Purpose of System Integration

Integration of the SmartInfo system is planned to improve the tourism infrastructure of Bulgaria by:

- 1) Creating a strong precondition for regulated development of tourism in Bulgaria
- 2) Integrating distant regions in Bulgaria to the main tourism circuit routes, services and standards
- 3) Integrating Bulgarian tourist services in European IS
- 4) Offering controlled resources and services for processing the licensing and categorization of tourism products and services.

## Need for a Technology Consultant

SmartInfo is a dynamic tourism industry project. It deserves the attention of highly trained and skilled professionals who specialize in database and web development, as well as marketing and advertising. The current SmartInfo design team listed the following criteria for a technology consultant:

The outsourcing contractor must be able to address the following issues:

- ii. Database transfer from Sybase SQL to MS SQL Server 7.x
- iii. Data migration into the new DB
- iv. Client/ Server module development
- v. Expand web module development
- vi. Integrate these new modules into the existing SmartInfo
- vii. Retain data security
- viii. Adhere to the set timeline
- ix. Consider an Educational Component
- x. Make the server delivery suitable for multiple users (10 minimum)

## Consulting Invitation

The purpose of this public order is to request the development of the Tourist Information System SmartInfo and MS SQL Server 7.x for at least 10 users. The consultant or team of consultants may decide upon the manner in which this task is accomplished. This task however, must be completed within 4 months after the work order is agreed upon. The method of payment will be a 30% direct deposit into the consultant's bank account prior to completion and 70%, the remaining payment, after project completion and presentation. The price of this work order will be determined by: 1) The price suggested by the consultant for completing all tasks, 2) The cost of educating the SmartInfo staff, 3) The guaranteeing of services, and 4) The price of the software package- MS SQL Server for 10 users. The final price doesn't include system development resources, such as technical and software resources. The Evaluation criteria is as follows:

| <b>Criteria</b>   | <b>Score</b>                                    |
|---|---|
| Degree of knowledge of modern information technologies, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MS SQL Server 7.x</li> <li>2. High quality of client/server resource, which offer an effective and accessible database</li> <li>3. Corporate resources and knowledge for inquiry generation</li> <li>4. Internet/Intranet technology knowledge and ability to integrate it with the SmartInfo concept</li> </ol> | 5 points<br>15 points<br>15 points<br>10 points |
| Proven experience for the last 5 years in developing web-based tasks  | 30 points                                       |
| Certificate of software product development, ISO 9001   | 25 points                                       |
| <b>Highest possible score</b>   | <b>100 points</b>                               |

The final Terms of Reference should be circulated to qualified firms in Bulgaria and throughout the world. The responses should be evaluated and managed following the standard Bulgarian procedures for RFP review. However, we do recommend that an additional committee of Government officials and industry professionals be selected to review the RFP before it is released and to assist in evaluating vendor proposals. Additional solicitation may be needed as SmartInfo expands and encompasses the recommended components such as an online reservations system and business improvement center.